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[Preventing TBI for all Ages](#)

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By Suzanne G. Martin, Senior Scientist/Clinical Psychologist with Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center



A TBI can happen to anyone and anywhere. It can happen while in combat from an improvised explosive device, playing sports, or just slipping on a wet surface.

The weather is warmer, the sun is shining and it's a great time for outdoor sports and summer fun. Unfortunately, it is also a time when summer activities can sometimes lead to serious injuries – like a traumatic brain injury.

A traumatic brain injury can be caused by a bump, blow or jolt to the head or a penetrating head injury, such as a gunshot wound, that disrupts the normal function of the brain.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention statistics, approximately 1.7 million people sustain a TBI each year in the United States usually through falls, motor vehicle crashes or assault.

A TBI can happen to anyone and anywhere. It can happen while in combat from an improvised explosive device, playing sports, or just slipping on a wet surface. Injuries can range from mild, otherwise known as a concussion, to severe. Fortunately the majority of TBIs are mild and individuals make a full recovery.



A traumatic brain injury can be caused by a bump, blow or jolt to the head or a penetrating head injury, such as a gunshot wound, that disrupts the normal function of the brain.

Most people who experience a concussion recover fully within a few weeks, but some may continue to have symptoms for a longer period of time. Individuals with chronic symptoms of concussion should get evaluated for other possible medical problems.

The good news is that there are several ways to help prevent a brain injury. For some general guidelines:

- Seat belts and airbags. Always wear a seat belt in a motor vehicle. A small child should always sit in the back seat of a car and be secured in child safety seats or booster seats that are appropriate for his or her size and weight.
- Alcohol and drug use. Don't drive under the influence of alcohol or drugs, including prescription medications that can impair the ability to drive.
- Helmets. Wear a helmet while riding a bicycle, skateboard, motorcycle, snowmobile or all-terrain vehicle. Also wear appropriate head protection when playing baseball or contact sports, skiing, skating, snowboarding, or riding a horse.

Older adults and children are at higher risk of brain injury and require special consideration:

Fall prevention for older adults includes installing handrails in bathrooms, putting a nonslip mat in the

bathtub or shower, removing area rugs, installing handrails on both sides of staircases, improving lighting in the home, keeping stairs and floors clear of clutter, getting regular vision checkups and getting regular exercise. Fall prevention for children includes installing safety gates at the top of a stairway, keeping stairs clear of clutter, installing window guards to prevent falls, putting a nonslip mat in the bathtub or shower, using playgrounds that have shock-absorbing materials on the ground, making sure area rugs are secure, and not letting children play on fire escapes or balconies.



Most people who experience a concussion recover fully within a few weeks, but some may continue to have symptoms for a longer period of time. Individuals with chronic symptoms of concussion should get evaluated for other possible medical problems.

If someone is injured, be aware of the warning signs of a traumatic brain injury. Common symptoms of a brain injury include headaches, dizziness, difficulty thinking or making decisions, fatigue, irritability, vision changes, balance problems, mood changes and sleep difficulty.

If the individual loses consciousness or feels confused or disoriented, call 911 or seek emergency medical help as soon as possible. The Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center offers free information to service members and veterans, family and friends, and medical providers about brain injury. At DVBIC.dcoe.mil, visitors can find answers to commonly-asked questions such as, “what kind of treatment is available for individuals with a TBI?”

By all means have fun this summer, but please be careful!

For more information, contact – [Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center](#). The Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center identifies active duty military and veterans with brain injury and provides resources to ensure they receive the best evaluation, treatment, and follow-up. Call DVBIC toll-free at 1-800-870-9244 or visit DVBIC on the Web at www.dvbic.org.

The [Brain Injury Association of America](#) focuses on prevention, research, education, and advocacy. BIAA has a national network of more than 40 state affiliates across the country and hundreds of local chapters and support groups. Call BIAA toll-free at 1-800-444-6443 or visit BIAA on the Web at www.biausa.org.

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